

Charity and Its Fruits

Scripture Reading — 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. —

We work with you for your joy ... that you would all share [our] joy. 2 Corinthians 1:24-2:3

"JOY!" exclaimed the ad in my stack of junk mail. The "O" in "joy" was a pizza! The makers of this pizza both underestimated the character of true joy and overestimated their pizza's ability to provide it. And "JOY!" could have been mine for only five dollars!

Deep affection for God will bring us more joy than any pizza or anything else could. And we must have joy in order to be able to impart joy to others.

John Piper insightfully defines real love as "the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others." In his book *Desiring God*, Piper points out that the source of generous giving is God and his divine grace; this experience of grace filled the Corinthian Christians with joy. Their joy from God and in God overflowed in generosity to the needy. They begged for an opportunity to help! In their joy they created joy in others by helping to meet their needs.

"None are true saints," said Jonathan Edwards, "except those who have the true character of compassion and concern to relieve the poor, indigent, and afflicted. Such love includes the whole sincere desire of the soul toward God and man." Or, as Frederick Buechner put it: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep need meet." Remember, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Prayer

"Make me a channel of your peace. Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope; where there is darkness, let me bring your light; and where there's sadness, ever joy." Amen.

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